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National supervision of the press and the...

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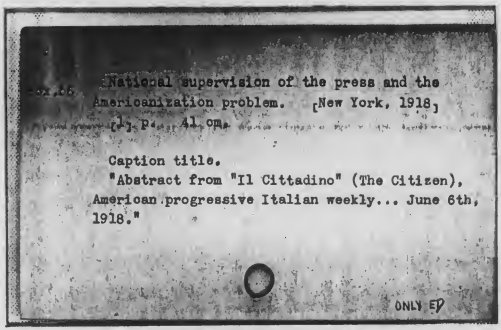

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Gift of the President

National Supervision of the Press and the Americanization Problem

From Rome comes the news that the "Avanti" the official Italian socialist publication advocates governmental supervision of the press.

Evidently the socialist party which has been severely rebuked for its attitude and baneful influence in the war, wants now to establish for itself as well as for others, the right to investigate governmental and other parties' press activities.

The Governmcnt should accept the challenge, for, under alert national supervision certain campaigns, from whatever source, could easily be detected, stopped or justified in their budding periods.

The Caporetto disaster, mainly due to the spreading of socialistic heresies, to subtle German propaganda and clerical interposition, could have been avoided with proper energetic defensible measures at the right time. *Salus patriae suprema lex.*

Applied to this country, the arrogant notice in the American papers warning people from going aboard the Lusitania and the Embargo appeal, if promptly investigated and brought to light, would have restrained German and Austrian emissaries or sympathizers from playing havoc with American good faith and patience.

The publication of Berlin communiques in preference to those from London, Paris or Rome and the ignoring of the American war aims, indulged by the enemy language press, would have been in itself sufficient reason for suppressing many foreign language newspapers.

Timely investigation on the effect of foreign language publications would have brought out long ago the fact that great masses of adult-immigrants — although economically benefited by their living here — have remained neutral or irresponsive to American ideals, through persistent or unique reading of papers printed in their mother tongue.

Only lately, through the bitter experience of the war, have the Government officials come to learn that the immigrants and their mediums have been left too much to themselves, that is, without any direct national control, and unhappily also without the united generous assistance from their most advanced and well-to-do compatriots.

Nobody should wonder — and least of all the Government of the United States — if in many instances the immigrants have remained completely foreign — nigh well through their lives — to the rest of the population; so much, that in great many rural communities and countless shops and establishments the common official language has been anything but English and that many children born here did not know a word of English until obliged to go to school.

The Americanization process, left to work itself out by better economic conditions and through the great school system, has been found too slow and inadequate by far sighted patriots and practical students of Americanization problems.

The proof has been the enormous number of young men of draft age unable to understand English, yet very anxious to fight for the Stars and Stripes and enthusiastic to have at last an opportunity to learn English and become worthy American citizens.

Like the immigrants, so the foreign language newspapers have been left to grow unattended. They, for self-preservation — not always devoid of good intentions — instead of fostering assimilation, have been prominent in the creation of foreign centres perpetuating old foreign ideas, much against the true moral and material welfare of the immigrants.

In fact, very few foreign language newspapers have had the common sense to recognize and the courage to tell point blank their readers that American citizenship is a *sine qua non* moral obligation to all immigrants making their homes here and that the old saying "in Rome do as the Romans" should also apply to the United States.

Only during election times, did most of the foreign language newspapers see fit to mix up in American politics for the money that there was in it, caring very little for the penetration of their countrymen into permanent American life.

In the same equivocal manner, chiefly through legislative neglect, the foreign language newspapers, with rare exceptions, have been the greatest tools to help "robbing" their compatriots of millions and millions of dollars through all sorts of fake advertisements.

Advertising literally within the law, but generally refused by American newspapers, for its self — evident base of crookedness, was eagerly sought or cheerfully accepted by selfish and unscrupulous foreign language newspapers devoted only to exploit their readers and advertisers.

Vice-versa, would be decent publishers dared not refuse certain obnoxious advertisements, lest they would lose the patronage of big American concerns and corporations and of the Political "machines" apparently under the exclusive control or influence of dishonest advertising agencies or agents, that oblige the publishers to accept all kinds of advertisements or take nothing.

With National supervision over the American policy and general activities of the foreign language press, many of its odious features, including unfair advertising practices as to rates, circulation and morality, would be eliminated.

Very wisely the Government has been able to care for the savings of the immigrants through supervision and limitation of banking operations or to protect them with Insurance and Compensation laws. Why not, as logically, protect them from un-American publications that spread poisonous doctrines, print bogus advertisements or do business under false representations?

How about obliging the foreign language newspapers to publish one eight of their reading matter in English? Such innovation would give their readers an opportunity to master English and also their true American sentiment could easily be ascertained, for no paper would consistently write one way in the mother language and differently in English.

And why not require from all proprietors of the papers or its directors, if edited by a corporation, that they be American citizens, as it is expected in many other businesses or enterprises much less related to public or national safety than the press?

If the publications of the half-thousand foreign language newspapers edited in this country and reaching several million foreigners were so altered and regulated — an easy matter to adjust under the permit system of the law of October 6th 1917 — it would prove a simple Americanization scheme of the most practical and far reaching consequences. It would prove particularly advantageous after the war, when immigrants from Europe will again come to these shores in large numbers and the fatal error of past national indifference towards them may not be repeated.

Americanization in its highest conception must be sought and taught by all mediums with which individuals come in contact and for the immigrant that does not know English or is too old to learn it, what better Americanization means can be offered than through a loyal bilingual foreign press?

Considering the fact, plain as the sun rises every morning, that the children of the immigrants will never feel anything but Americans at the bottom of their heart, it becomes a duty on the part of the foreign language newspapers to amalgamate the adult immigrant with American conditions, in all sincerity and with utmost fervor and keep, as they say, the father in harmony with the son.

As we had occasion to say before this, the foreign language newspapers have the right to be issued only on condition that their program should not be inimical to the best interests of the country of adoption or not be allowed to circulate.

A legislative measure that will help inject or insure proper American spirit into the foreign language press and free it from mere parasites, should be welcome by all those of our colleagues who really have at heart the amelioration of their countrymen.

The quicker it will be understood and put into effect, the sooner shall the independent foreign language press have something to be proud of and the American public will look upon us as a noble and necessary asset for the benefit and betterment of the common great American melting pot.

Judging from our own experience we found that our efforts in that direction have been appreciated. Many of our Italian readers consider our English section a very interesting feature and take pride in showing it to their American friends, procuring us subscribers among them.

Several leading American newspapers cited our editorials on various occasions, while Italian contemporaries have honored us by reproducing them as their own, or followed our lead independently and just as successfully, so that the practicality and opportunity of our suggestions has already been demonstrated.

It only needs general compulsory application.

Abstract from

"IL CITTADINO" (THE CITIZEN)

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